



TNEC

Tribal Nations Education Committee

Position on Education

Education for American Indians is a treaty right.

The Indian Commerce Clause of the United States Constitution recognizes that tribes are sovereign entities that are not subordinate to states and therefore must be dealt with on a government-to-government basis. The Tribal Nations Education Committee (TNEC) was established to remedy the lack of government-to-government communication, cooperation and consultation between the State and tribal nations related to education.

It is the mission of the TNEC to strengthen, protect and advance the overall education experience and opportunities for all American Indian students, families and communities of Minnesota. The TNEC is endorsed by both the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe Executive Committee and the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council.

Tribal nations and the State of Minnesota must continue to work towards strengthening and advancing the educational experiences for all American Indian students, educators, families and communities of Minnesota. Tribal nations expect the State of Minnesota to recognize and meet the unique educational needs of our students, educators, families and communities.

According to 2012 U.S. Department of Education data, the State of Minnesota has the lowest graduation rate for American Indian students in the Nation. This is tragic and unacceptable. The TNEC requests State agencies to work with us in identifying and implementing strategies to improve the educational outcomes for all American Indian students within all Minnesota-based education programs.

Early Learning

Support for Early Learning programs is an investment. There is convincing evidence that high quality early learning experiences give American Indian children the tools to be ready to learn when they begin kindergarten. It is the framework for children to develop strong foundational cognitive skills, develop social emotional competence and establish patterns of engagement in school and learning.

In order to ensure that all American Indian children have access to quality early learning programming, the Minnesota Legislature must:

- continue to support proposals to increase funding for the Race to the Top/Early Learning Scholarships;
- create a Tribal set-aside for Early Learning Scholarships;
- designate State appropriated funds to increase slots for Head Start programs, and
- expand Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) funds to reach all Tribal communities.

Kindergarten through Grade 12

The American Indian Education Act of 1988 is legislation to provide for American Indian education programs specially designed to meet unique educational or culturally related academic needs. The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) must inform and hold all districts within the State accountable to this law.

The TNEC requests the Minnesota Department of Education and school districts to:

- remove barriers for participation in extracurricular activities such as transportation and fees;
- implement 'American Indian Education for All', including curriculum and instruction of American Indian history, government, culture, science, arts and other contributions of American Indians in all Minnesota schools for all students;
- coordinate efforts to support American Indian students and communities;
- provide technical assistance to American Indian communities;
- advance community outreach and other activities to enhance the education of American Indian students, and
- coordinate department technical assistance to help American Indian students to meet state proficiency standards.

The TNEC requests all professional boards and associations to:

- be inclusive of Tribal Schools in membership, trainings and resources, and
- require School Administrators, including but not limited to Superintendents, Principals, Counselors and School Board Members, to learn about Tribal Sovereignty, Tribal Communities and Tribal students in order to better meet the needs of American Indian students.

The TNEC requests the State of Minnesota to:

- increase the personnel and fiscal capacity of the Minnesota Indian Education Office in order to
 - provide technical assistance and guidance to Early Childhood Programs and K-12 schools,
 - assist with school programs on the reservations,
 - provide training and support to Indian Home School Coordinators, adult basic education, Success for the Future Program staff, and Title VII Indian parent committee trainings;
 - provide cultural competence training activities, and
 - re-examine alternative high school equivalency test options.

Higher Education

Higher education, whether it is an academic degree program or technical program, is no longer an option; it is a necessity. The TNEC is committed to making a full range of higher education options available, accessible and successful for all American Indian students in Minnesota.

The TNEC requests the State of Minnesota to:

- initiate action to increase the drastically underrepresented number of American Indian school teachers in our public school systems by:
 - providing incentive aid to school districts to encourage the hiring and retention of American Indian K-12 certified, licensed teachers, principals and superintendents, and
 - adequately fund the Minnesota Indian Teacher Training Program;
- support the Commissioner of MDE and the Commissioner of the Office of Higher Education to ensure that colleges and universities have complied with the request to modify teacher training programs to include curriculum with specific content regarding tribal sovereignty, history and culture for all students entering the field of education;
- support a tuition and fee waiver for all American Indian students attending MNSCU and U of MN institutions in order to increase access;
- support equalization funds for Minnesota Tribal Colleges in order to stabilize tribal colleges' core institutional funding, and
- support research to better serve the diverse demographic needs of American Indian students in regards to the Minnesota Indian Scholarship program.

The TNEC requests the Minnesota State Colleges & University System (MNSCU), the University of Minnesota, Minnesota's Private Colleges, and Tribal Colleges to:

- identify, develop and implement strategies to address the issues of retention of American Indian students;
- submit an annual report to Tribes on the status of these and other efforts related to the outcomes of American Indian students in higher education systems prior to the end of July each year;
- modify teacher training programs to include curriculum with specific content regarding tribal sovereignty, history and culture for all students entering the field of education by 2014;
- require licensed teachers to enroll in continuing education courses in these content areas every five years in order to maintain their teaching licensure;
- require all Indian Teacher Training programs to include specific and integrated instruction to better prepare teachers to meet the needs of American Indian students, and
- support collaborations between Minnesota Tribal Colleges and other higher education institutions (articulations agreements, two-plus-two programs, etc).

Language Revitalization & Immersion

Education and Language Revitalization are key to our communities and improving the lives of our people. Research indicates that American Indian students achieve at higher rates when taught through comprehensive, full-day language immersion programs that incorporate environment, culture and language and in traditional schools which imbed environment, culture and language.

The TNEC requests the State of Minnesota to:

- continue to support Native language revitalization through the Minnesota Legacy Amendment;
- commit financial resources to support current Native language immersion models, curriculum and program development, and
- increase support for future community based, Tribal based and Tribal College based programs that will strengthen the Native language revitalization movement.

Accomplishments

Tribes know best their unique needs. Minnesota Tribal Nations were aware that the State was not in compliance with their sovereign rights regarding education. Thus, they took action by creating and authorizing their own independent education committee to work directly with state agencies. As a result, Tribal Nations are once again recognized within the Minnesota Department of Education and cited in state statute. A respectful relationship between Tribes and the State is now growing. The TNEC submits its Position on Education to the State annually and continues to build relationships with State agencies that allows for meaningful consultation with results. The following are some of the accomplishments either initiated and/or supported by Minnesota Tribal Nations as a result of exercising their sovereignty:

- the establishment of the Tribal Nations Education Committee;
- the Minnesota Department of Education will hold an Indian Education Summit each year for key stakeholders, to include but not limited to tribal administrators, Tribal Colleges, school administrators, educators, Indian Education staff parents and students, on relevant issues facing Indian Education in the State of Minnesota;
- the Tribal Nations Education Committee is written into state statute with the following language: The commissioner shall seek consultation with the Tribal Nations Education Committee on all issues relating to American Indian education;
- the Office of Indian Education was reinstated in 2012 with the hiring of an Indian Education Director, and the position became permanent per state statute;
- the Minnesota Legislature has funded all-day every-day kindergarten programs across the state, thus making kindergarten available for all Minnesota children;
- the Minnesota Legislature supported Governor Dayton's proposed funding for School Bullying Prevention, and
- an increased appropriation for the Minnesota Indian Scholarship Program.